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HARRY WILLSON WATROUS

"THE CONNOISSEUR"

(See frontispiece and opposite page)

WE offer this month what we think will prove a surprise to many of our readers in Timothy Cole's engraving on wood after "The Connoisseur," a painting by Harry Willson Watrous.

We say this because as a mere piece of painting—from the standpoint of the kind of craftsmanship of the Little Masters of the Flemish school—we believe this to be one of the most marvelous single performances since ter Borch. It is superior to anything Meissonier did in the same line—merely as painting. And if an artist is to be judged only by his power as a craftsman and as manifested by one single picture Harry Watrous, has by this "Connoisseur" lifted himself to a place by the side of ter Borch, Dow, van Mieris, Ver Meer, and Van Eyck.

The subject is commonplace it is true. But Watrous has certainly ennobled it to a great work of art by charming composition, wonderful drawing, extraordinarily skilful painting, and by the profound expression of intellectual pleasure this connoisseur of engravings is finding in the study of his collection.

For finesse of painting, according to the formula of "the little masters" and of the modern Whistler: "A picture is finished when all traces of the means used to bring about the end have disappeared," it is equal to anything done by any other artist of the Nineteenth Century.

While we do not believe that exquisite craftsmanship is the highest element in art, there are those who do think so. By those this picture must be regarded on closer acquaintance, as one of the priceless gems of American art, above all, since there is a suggestion of poetry in the story—that of a rich and handsome young man finding joy in the contemplation of the beautiful work of

artists and, so teaching the world in an indirect way that great art is the highest thing in this life.

Watrous never again reached this high-water-mark of skill—which neither a photograph nor even Mr. Cole's masterly engraving can reveal—though he often came close to it. But in his effort to keep to this high standard, he strained his eyes and nearly lost them. When restored, he was compelled either to abandon painting all together or change his style by handling larger subjects that require less minute work and eye-strain. He then chose a line of subjects in which he gave vent to his delicate wit and genial satire, subjects which have been the delight of many who love intellectually stimulating art. We print a reproduction of one of these on opposite page "Lead Us Not into Temptation." It easily recalls Burns's famous lines:

O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us
And foolish notion.
What airs o' dress an' gait wad lea' us
And e'en devotion.

If his drawing in his latter works is a little, what the artists call "hard" and his painting lacks the juicy, rich, quality of his earlier works, the public will remember that it is due to eye-strain and not to a diminution of his intellectual powers. Certainly his work is enduring and another proof that members of the National Academy have created masterpieces that will increasingly honor the nation.

One thing is certain if Mr. Watrous were a Frenchman he would now be regarded, in this country, as a master. And this is true of a score or more of other artists who are without adequate honor in their own country.

MANHATTAN MORNING

Above the shadowy silhouette
Of black Manhattan Bridge one star
Strikes the last silver note—afar
The dawn is swathed in violet.

And all the lower Eastern sky
Is tinged now with a roseate glow,
Beyond the housetops row on row
The little leaden moon drifts by,

A fluttering moth that fears to burn
Her blue-veined wings in morning's beam
Or as the pale ghost of a dream
That flies from sightless eyes that yearn:

The rose is turned to amber light:
Like a young warrior in the field
The sun has tossed his saffron shield,
His red torch makes the towers bright.

Theodore Lynch Fitz-Simons